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A Sustainable Solution for Meeting Colorado's Water Needs Through 2050

*Conservation Organizations Offer Blueprint That Meets Future Water Needs While Protecting
Communities and Rivers*

DENVER – Western Resource Advocates (WRA), Trout Unlimited (TU) and the Colorado Environmental Coalition (CEC) today released a plan that outlines how Colorado Front Range communities can meet projected human water demands through 2050 while keeping rivers healthy. In the new report, "[Filling the Gap: Commonsense Solutions for Meeting Front Range Water Needs](#)," the conservation groups detail an approach that relies on low-impact water supply projects, conservation, water reuse, and agricultural-urban water cooperation to meet Colorado's growing water demands.

Colorado is currently working through the Interbasin Compact Committee (IBCC) process to determine how the state's river basins can meet their future water needs. The IBCC is considering a number of new storage projects, transbasin diversions, and moving of water over long distances. The "Filling the Gap" report offers an alternative plan showing how Front Range communities in the South Platte River Basin, home to some of Colorado's largest municipalities including Denver, Boulder, and Fort Collins, can meet future needs without new major diversions of water from other river basins. The plan outlined in the "Filling the Gap" report is designed to be less expensive than traditional water supply approaches.

"Filling the Gap" identifies some water projects that the conservation groups could accept, if they were developed using a set of economically and environmentally- sound principals for minimizing the harm to streams and rivers. Some of these projects include the Chatfield Reservoir Reallocation, the Windy Gap Firming Project, Beebe Draw Aquifer Recharge, East Cherry Creek Valley's Northern Project, as well expansion or enlargement of the Halligan Reservoir, Seaman Reservoir, and Gross Reservoir.

Coloradans are increasingly recognizing the critical importance of healthy flows to Colorado's rivers and streams, which provide substantial economic and public benefits. For decades, many of these rivers and streams have been overtapped and pushed to the brink of collapse by multiple diversions.

"Many of Colorado's rivers and streams are depleted to the point that they no longer support robust fisheries or recreational opportunities," said Drew Peternell, director of TU's Colorado Water Project. "Additional diversions from these streams could be devastating. 'Filling the Gap' charts a responsible path for meeting our water needs while protecting our state's high quality of life."

The report recommends that expanded conservation should play a key role in meeting future water demands. More than 50 percent of municipal water use is devoted to lawn watering, a use with low economic benefits when compared to other uses. By offering comprehensive incentives for consumers and industry to use water more efficiently, Front Range communities can achieve considerable water savings that can be used as new supply.

"This is low-hanging fruit," said Drew Beckwith, the report's primary author and WRA water policy manager. "Conservation is often the cheapest, fastest and smartest way to gain 'new' water supply."

"Front Range communities are projected to double in size by 2050 so we must use water more wisely," said Beckwith. "It is remarkable that increased water conservation and reuse efforts could nearly fill the gap between Front Range water supplies and growing demand."

Agriculture, the largest sector of water use in the state, has been viewed as a target of water transfers to meet growing urban and municipal water needs. The report acknowledges that water sharing agreements can be beneficial to both sides, but "buy and dry" practices that permanently retire active farmland and reduce open space are the least desirable option. Instead, the report advocates voluntary and temporary market-based water transactions.

"By balancing competing uses and protecting rivers and streams, Colorado can sustain its growth and economy without harming its outdoors heritage and quality of life," said Becky Long, Water Caucus Coordinator for the Colorado Environmental Coalition.

The "Filling the Gap" report provides a realistic and achievable blueprint for meeting the water demands of a population that is expected to double by the year 2050.

The report and supporting materials are available at <http://www.westernresourceadvocates.org/gap>

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Trout Unlimited is the nation's largest coldwater conservation organization, with 140,000 members dedicated to conserving, protecting, and restoring North America's trout and salmon fisheries and their watersheds.

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Colorado Environmental Coalition, the largest state-based citizens' group focused on protecting our air, land and water.

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